

God's Portrayal of His Church

By Homer A. Kent

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.—Ephesians 3:14-21.

The marvelous prayer recorded in Ephesians 3:14-21 is made on behalf of the Church. For the Church Paul desired the mighty strength of the Holy Spirit. For the Church he sought the ever conscious presence of the Blessed Christ. For her he prayed the realization of the knowledge of the love of Christ that is beyond expression, that transcends human thought, that thus she may be filled with the fulness of God. As he thus prays he has in mind not Israel whom he loved as his own soul, though Israelites were included, not alone a local congregation such as that at Ephesus, but the whole "ecclesia" of God. His prayer is for the Church. The Church which is founded upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, which had its beginning at Pentecost and continues to this present day, whose executive head in this world is the Holy Spirit.

The Church therefore is that body of believers who have named Christ as Savior and Lord. It is an invisible body. Its outward expression is the visible churches we see all over the world who acknowledge Christ as their Head. This epistle of Paul to the Ephesians is given over to a portrayal of the Church and the functions of that Church in the world. In depicting the Church he has symbolized it by certain objects which are well known to us all and which serve to help us see the Church as it really is in relation to the heart of God and to the heart of the world. May God help us to understand the Church, which is the grandest institution upon which the sun shines. God honors the man who honors his Church. The man who touches the Church touches God. He who speaks a word against the Church speaks against Christ. It is God's institution.

I. First, the Church is symbolized as a building, a temple. We have it in Ephesians 2:20-22. The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The building is a growth. We shall not fully appreciate what Paul is talking about until we understand a bit about the method of building temples in ancient days. For example, there is the Ephesian temple of Diana. It took 220 years to build it. It was made of shining marble. Some of the shafts were sixty feet long. The temple was of immense proportions. It was not one building but many. Porticoes, great halls, covered walks. But all "growing" together to give the aspect of one immense building dedicated to the worship of the goddess Diana.

Or take the temple at Karnak, the largest in the world, with its great colonnades, its mammoth pylons, its avenues of sphinxes, its statues, its graceful obelisks piercing the sky, its great corridors, its halls. It covers

acres upon acres of ground yet it is so unified as to grow into one temple.

What magnificent truth is hidden away in the symbolism of the building! All believers are parts of the building of God. That building is "growing" upon its foundation, Jesus Christ. A part of it is in heaven today, a part of it is on earth. It shall continue to grow until Christ comes and puts on the capstone. Then we shall have a completed temple. Each individual believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit but no believer is big enough to hold all there is of God, so he dwells in the aggregation of believers which we call the Church. And in that unified body he expresses himself to the world. What dignity this gives to membership in the Church!

II. Secondly, the Church is Symbolized as a Body. God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Marvelous beyond comprehension are these words! "This body which is the Church is the fulness, the complement, the filled up receptacle of God. Who is it that makes it so? It is Christ. The Church is the fullest manifestation of his grace and mercy and gifts. She is the full manifestation of his being because penetrated by his life."

A body implies life. The Church is a live thing. The life is Christ. This is why you can never kill the church. The very gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

A body has many members. It has many functions. The foot is not for the same purpose as the eye. If we attempt to walk with our hands we belong to the jungle. Each member of that body has its peculiar service to render which no other member can perform. If we do not know what our peculiar function is we must find out or else we will be misfits in the church. This all being true it is not for us to criticize the services of another. Each must serve in his own way only in the Lord. Not all are good executives. Some are. Not all are good teachers. Some are. Not all are blessed with winsome personalities. Some are. Not all can be the head, else who would be the foot? Christ uses all kinds of people in his Church. There is a place for every one. For a Peter and a John. For a Mary and a Martha. For a rich man and a poor man. For the lovely and the unlovely. All can contribute something to the enrichment of the body of Christ.

That for which Christ pleads in his body, the Church, is purity. He longs for a healthy Church. The tragedy of the Church today is that there are so many within its bounds who are not living as they ought to live and are bringing reproach upon the whole Church and most of all upon its Lord. The Church pure is the Church powerful. That kind of a church made the Apostolic Church the force it proved to be. The lesson from Ananias and Sapphira stands out. They were stricken down because they presumed to lie to God. That was a Church powerful because it refused to permit such a thing as a lie to live within its bounds. Oh, for a Church that is pure, free from reproach, that functions in all its membership!

The Church then is a body. The body the noblest creation of God! Through this body Christ expresses himself to men. It is a part of Christ. Do you realize that your feet are the only feet to run Christ's errands? Your mouth is his instrument to speak his message. Your voice is to sing his praises. Your hands to work his work. Are you busy for him?

III. Thirdly, the Church is symbolized as a bride. "For

this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:31, 32). "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2).

The picture of the oriental bride may help us here. Her attitude toward her husband is that of absolute loyalty. She says at the time of the wedding ceremony, "I dedicate this heart to love none other but my husband, these hands to serve none but him, these eyes to look upon none other but him, these ears to hear nothing but his praises, these feet to walk but for him."

A like loyalty characterizes the Church of Jesus Christ, his bride, to her bridegroom, the Lord. The true Church dedicates her heart, her life, her talents, her all to him and pledges an eternal allegiance to him. Loyalty on the part of the membership of the Church is one of the crying needs of the day. The visible Church is too much divided. We are not as one army under one Captain. Our loyalty can often be questioned. Let us be so constant in our devotion to him that when his purposes for the Church on earth are done and we are called to sit down with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb we shall not be ashamed.

IV. Fourthly, the Church is symbolized as a family. "Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14, 15). God is the everlasting Father, Jesus Christ is our Elder Brother and Savior, "and all ye are brethren." Thus a home is pictured, a home where perfect relationship exists. Home has been described as the sweetest word in the English language. Of course the word is thought of in connection with the home that approaches the ideal, where those things and conditions do not enter which make home a hell for so many. We do not think in this connection of the thousands of broken homes in the world where the members are out of harmony.

But the church is the family of believers united by ties closer than the ties of human blood,—yea, by the ties of Christ's blood. In the church there is no caste, no race, no color, no province. We are all one in him.

Have you this conception of Christ's Church? It exists for the praise of his glory. It shall be triumphant. God's purposes cannot fail. It is the body of Christ. It is the greatest of all honors to belong to it. Let us endeavor to so conduct ourselves within the membership of the Church that we shall not in any wise bring reproach upon it, so that Christ may indeed express himself through his body.

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